



Decision Notice:

Cottonwood Creek Rehabilitation and Native Salmonid Reintroduction

July 25, 2007

Proposal

The proposed action is to chemically rehabilitate Cottonwood Creek using two treatments of the piscicide Legumine and Antimycin. Toxicant will be neutralized at the lower end of the treatment reach (10.5 miles of stream) using Potassium Permanganate. The goal of the treatment would be to eradicate nonnative brook followed by the restocking of genetically pure, native westslope cutthroat trout. Application techniques that will be used to apply the piscicides will include drip stations, and manual backpack spraying. Multiple application methods are required to effectively treat a variety of habitat types that exist in Cottonwood Creek.

Cottonwood Creek was chemically rehabilitated in 2003 using rotenone. However, a complete kill of the brook trout was not accomplished during this treatment. Therefore, this EA proposes to use different piscicides (Legumine and Antimycin) in an effort to kill 100% of the brook trout above the fish barrier. This EA was completed in the fall of 2006 with no comments received in opposition or support.

Environmental Policy Act Process

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is required to assess potential impacts of the proposal to the human and physical environment. In compliance with requirements of the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed by FWP and released for a 45-day public comment period on July 20th, 2006. There are no ground disturbing actions proposed on forest system lands that would require the U.S. Forest Service to complete and analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act.

The EA was mailed to 34 individuals/groups on the FWP's MEPA mailing list in 2006. News releases and Legal Notices, which announced the availability of the EA, were published in the Helena Independent Record and the Great Falls Tribune. Seiben Livestock was verbally contacted and notified of the proposed treatment dates on July 25, 2007.

There were no issues raised during the public comment period on the EA. There are no modifications to the Draft EA based on no public comment, and the Draft EA and Decision Notice serve as the final document.

Decision

Based on the Environmental Assessment, public comment, and the high risk of extinction of genetically pure WCT in the Upper Missouri Basin, it is my decision to proceed with the restoration project to remove exotic eastern brook trout in the stream reach above the artificial fish barrier on Cottonwood Creek (Beartooth Wildlife Management Area) and attempt to establish a pure strain population of WCT after the chemical rehabilitation project is completed. This alternative provides the best opportunity to benefit the conservation and restoration of WCT in Montana, help relieve ESA listing pressure and also serve as to illustrate the State's commitment to perpetuating native fish species.

This project will help secure pure WCT in the Upper Missouri Basin by expanding their distribution to approximately 10.5 additional stream miles, and could provide a "genetic reserve" for a population deemed to have a high risk of extinction. I find there to be no significant impact on the human or physical environment associated with this project, except to help ensure the long-term persistence of pure, locally adapted WCT in the Upper Missouri Basin. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Gary Bertellotti /s/ Date: August 10, 2007
Gary Bertellotti
Region 4 Supervisor
Great Falls, Montana